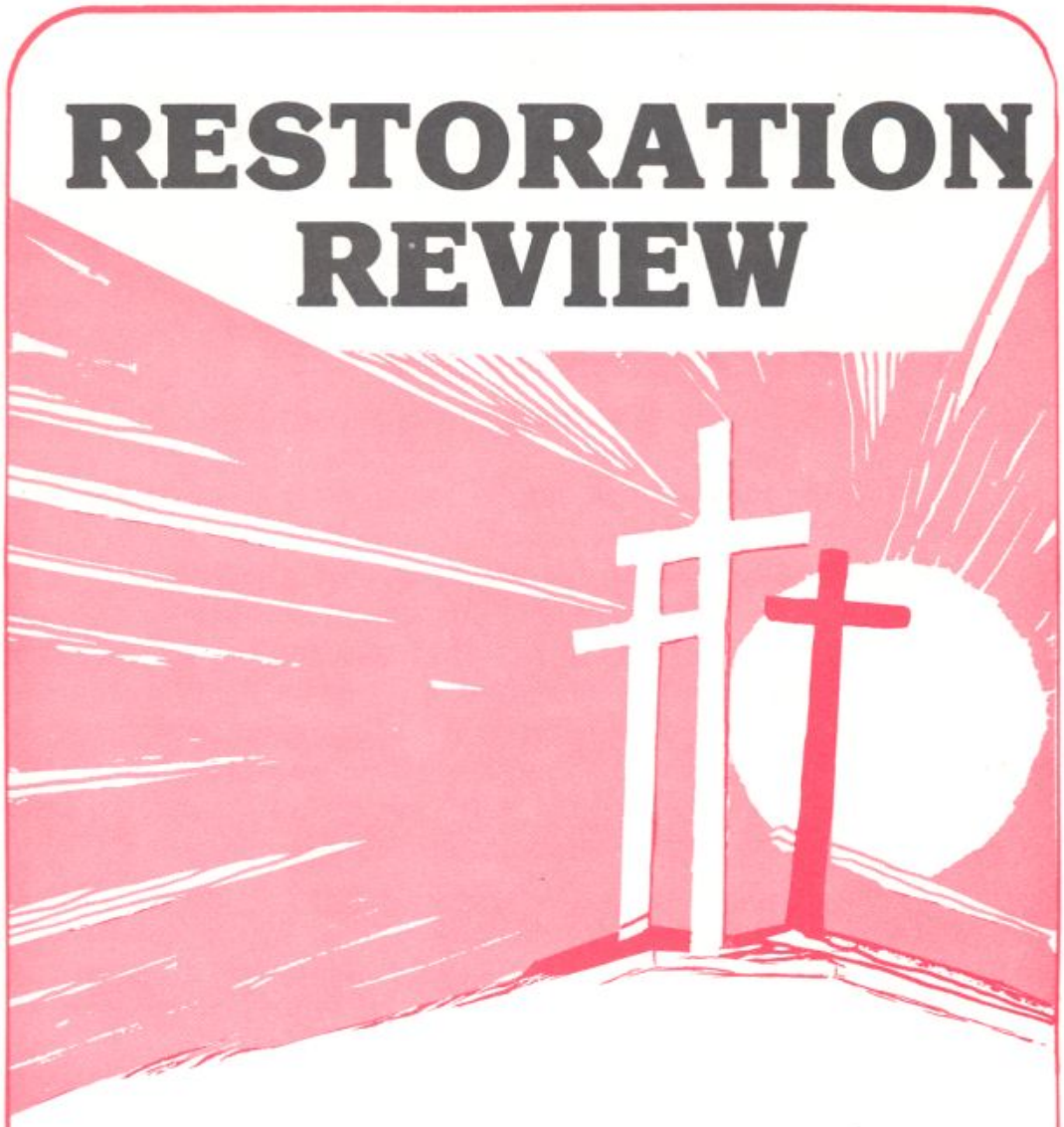
RESTORATION REVIEW



A heavy guilt rests upon us for what the whites of all nations have done to the colored peoples. When we do good to them, it is not benevolence. It is atonement. -- *Albert Schweitzer*

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The Underbelly of the Black Church of Christ

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Adventures of the Early Church …

THE MAN THE CHURCH HAD TO HAVE

Looking back on 2,000 years of the Christian faith, it may not be as apparent to us, but the primitive church faced a tremendous problem in becoming a world-wide (ecumenical) faith. Its purpose was to reach out to all mankind. While the Christ described his own mission as being for "the lost sheep of the house of Israel," he clearly brought a catholic message and his commission to his envoys was that they were to make disciples of all nations. The apostles understood that when Jesus was lifted up to die on the cross he did so in order to draw *all* men to himself, not just the Jews (Jn. 12:32).

And yet the context for the beginning of the faith was all Jewish. The protagonist in the drama was Jewish, as were most of the antagonists, whether Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians. The setting, whether the temple, synagogues or Sanhedrin, was Jewish. The early church's Bible was Jewish, as were its first converts. The earliest missionaries were Jewish and they went first to fellow Jews. Even when it became thinkable that non-Jews were to be included, there was the assurance, "To the Jew first. . ." The first congregations, and they were not just a few, were Jewish, and they were called synagogues. They were in fact Jews who believed that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah and not "Christians." The new Jewish "sect" as it was sometimes called was upwards of ten years old before there was a "Christian" in it. While believers were eventually called "Christians" in Antioch (Acts 11:26), there is a question as to whether the believers ever called themselves that. They were of "The Way" and that way was first walked by Jews.

The new faith's first major crisis was whether it would remain another Jewish sect, and there were many such sects, or whether it would reach out to all the world. While it had its mandate from its Lord to "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature," it was slow to act. Years passed, perhaps a decade. When persecution finally drove the believers from their homes out into a larger world, they bore witness to their faith as far away as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, but their historian is careful to record that their message was "to Jews alone" (Acts 11:19). It took a miracle, or perhaps several, in the form of "conversion of Peter," which we might refer to as well as "the conversion of Cornelius" to turn the gospel toward the Gentiles. However much the big fisherman had listened to the ecumenical Jesus of Nazareth, he was not ready to share his riches with non-Jews. It took some doing to bring the apostle Peter, however filled he was with the

Holy Spirit, to the place that he could say, “I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right, is welcome to Him” (Acts 10:34-35).

But Peter could not accept emotionally what he understood intellectually, so in spite of the wonders he experienced among the Gentiles he never really accepted the Gentiles in his heart of hearts. Jesus had given him the keys of the kingdom. He understood his use of the first one, when he opened the way to the Jews on the day of Pentecost, but he never quite grasped the significance of the key he used to open the way for the Gentiles in the home of Cornelius. God eventually called another envoy to proclaim the message to the Gentiles, and he would have to stand up to “the chief of the apostles” in his apparent inability to accept Gentile believers as equals (Gal. 2:11-14).

This introduces us to the man the church had to have if it were to become truly catholic. He had to be a certain kind of a man, one far different from the likes of Peter, whose world was small. This man had to belong to two worlds. He had to be a Jew so as to be able to understand and to communicate with the church that was still Jewish but destined to become world-wide. He also had to be a Greek so as to identify with “the Greek world,” which described the nations nestled around the great Mediterranean Sea and reached as far as Rome itself. This was the world that the church was to enter and conquer, as per the charge from the Messiah.

The problem of exclusivism was compounded by the fact that the Jews were hated by other nations, just as they hated other nations. Pagan generals were sometimes urged to destroy Jews since they refused fellowship with other people and supposed all men to be their enemies. Josephus refers to a tradition that even Moses urged the Jews to show no goodwill to other nations and to destroy whatever altars and temples they might have. The Roman historian Tacitus complained that when a Gentile became a Jewish proselyte he was taught to despise the gods, repudiate his nationality, and hold worthless his parents, children and friends.

This means that the man essential to the church at this particular time had to be one who could become “all things to all men” and who could take the Greek concepts of love, brotherhood, community, and fellowship and capture them for the ecclesia of Christ. Such a man could speak of God in Jewish terms but also proclaim him as one in whom “we live and move and have our very being” to Gentiles, while quoting their poets to the effect that

"We are offsprings of God." While it was a miracle that the man God called to be "a light to the Gentiles" would be both a Pharisee and a Roman citizen, such was the case with this man of two worlds, Saul of Tarsus.

There is no need to belabor the point that Saul of Tarsus who became God's chosen vessel "to bear my name before the Gentiles" was thoroughly Jewish. He had no problem in saying "To the Jews I became a Jew" (1 Cor. 9:20), for he could describe himself as a Hebrew," an Israelite, and of the seed of Abraham, as he did in 2 Cor. 11:22, which was more than most Jews in his day could say. A Hebrew was one who still spoke Hebrew, while most Jews scattered among the Greek nations had forgotten their native language. An Israelite was one who belonged to the covenant people, while one "of the seed of Abraham" could claim racial purity. Moreover, he was circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, as to the law, a Pharisee" (Phillip 3:5). The term "a Hebrew of Hebrews" meant he was nurtured in his native tongue by parents who also spoke the language. Saul of Tarsus, a zealous Pharisee who became the apostle Paul, could argue that no one was more Jewish than he.

But he could also argue that no Jew was more Hellenistic (Greek) than he. Not only did he speak Greek as well as Hebrew, but he was a citizen of a Greek city, Tarsus in Cilicia, which he proudly hailed as "no mean city." Tarsus was both a trade and manufacturing center, one of its products being goats' hair felt for tent-making, a trade that Paul learned. Since ships from all parts of the Mediterranean sailed through Tarsus' rivers and docks, the future envoy of Christ to the Gentiles grew up with an expansive world-view.

Paul's home city also exported scholars since it had its own university. Strabo, a Roman historian, names as many as five scholars, all from Tarsus, who taught in Greek universities. Tarsus also produced several Stoic philosophers. It also enjoyed the status of being a free city, self-governing and independent, which may have influenced some of Paul's democratic principles for the ecclesia of Christ. "No mean city" was an apt description.

Paul's Roman citizenship, which was his not for a price but because he was "free born," qualified him all the more as "an apostle to the Gentiles." And it sometimes spared his life and tempered the persecution he was destined to suffer ("I will show him how much he must suffer for my name's sake" — Acts 9:16). The magistrates at least apologized to him for applying the lash to his back once they realized he was a Roman citizen (Acts 16:39), and his citizenship gave him the right to appeal to Caesar, which enabled him to proclaim the gospel in faraway Rome (Acts 25:11-12).

It could be argued that Saul of Tarsus was the only man in the world at that time who could do what had to be done to move the ecclesia of Christ from the thralldom of a Jewish sect to the church catholic. Paul certainly saw himself as especially called for such a mission, “even from my mother’s womb” he wrote in Gal. 1:15. All along God was nurturing him and preparing him for the task, so that “I might preach Christ among the Gentiles” (Gal. 1:16). He was convinced that it was “by the will of God” that he was called to his mission (2 Cor. 1:1).

Paul became the great communicator as well as a bridge builder between worlds. His teaching about God, the Messiah, grace, sin, and salvation, and even ethics found their source in Jewish and Greek life and culture as well as “by revelation there was made known unto me the mystery,” as he put it in Eph. 3:3. Even “the mystery” that he refers to touches the two worlds, for it was the great truth that Jews and Gentiles, long deemed irreconcilable, were destined to become one body in Christ Jesus (Eph. 3:6). We may conclude that the God of heaven called Paul, even before he was born, to make the great mystery happen.

And yet it was this ecumenical mission that brought Paul into conflict with his own Jewish brethren. They could accept the fact that the gospel was “To the Jew first,” but they had trouble with the rest of the statement: “but also to the Gentile.” When Paul addressed his brethren in Jerusalem, he recounted how God had called him to bear witness to all men of what he had seen and heard, which was difficult enough for the Jews to accept, but when he insisted that God appeared to him in their own temple and said to him, “I will send you far away to the Gentiles,” it was too much for them. Only the strong arm of Roman law kept them from killing the apostle on the spot (Acts 22:21-24).

Paul suffered as few men have for the cause of Christ and largely because of his broader vision and ecumenical mission. And because of him the apostle John was one day able to write of what he saw when he looked into heaven: “I looked, and behold, a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands” (Rev. 7:9).

The lion of God, as Paul is sometimes called, had a great mind and a great heart, and he was a man of two worlds. God had prepared him for an almost impossible task and gave him victory. Because of him we can all affirm, as the church has for centuries: We

believe in the one, holy, apostolic and *catholic* church. Had the ecclesia of Christ remained a sect, we would not be here; if we allow it to be sectarian again, we don't deserve to be here. — *the Editor*

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A CHURCH BEHIND PRISON BARS

Eastham Prison, near Crockett, is one of 21 facilities within the Texas Department of Corrections and one of five maximum-security units within the system, most of its 2500 inmates being repeaters who are serving longer sentences for more serious crimes. While the average age of a prisoner in other units is 23, at Eastham it is 28. The facility, which is secured by two tall chain-link fences and oodles of barbed wire instead of stone walls, is situated on a 3,000 acre farm, which provides work for many of the inmates.

I was pleased that the warden permitted Ouida to accompany me on a visit to the church behind those prison bars, and once we passed through the electronically-controlled twin gates in the yard, there were three or four other iron gates en route to the chapel. To hear a prison door clang shut *behind* you is an eerie and ominous sound. Once we were in the long, wide hall leading to the chapel, we saw masses of men, all dressed in white shirts and pants, filing into the huge mess hall for their evening meal. We took time to study the menu for all three meals that day which was posted on the wall, which confirmed complaints we had heard from folk in the area when we dined at a Mom's and Pop's cafe in nearby Lovelady: "They eat a lot better than they do in the slums of Dallas or Houston!"

Those who hang out at such places like to tell about prison breaks, riots, and stabbings, and one can count on embellishments. But we found it to be true that a guard had recently been stabbed while attempting to pass a tray of food to a "locked in" (segregated) inmate. The prisoner thrust a self-made blade through the small aperture when it was opened to feed him, attempting to murder a man he did not even know. It was also true that several convicts had excavated their way to freedom a few days before, but only for a few brief hours. But there is one story they tell, with a touch of admiration for the subject, of the convict who walked away from the field where he was working and has never been heard of since, and he only had a few more months to serve. Since the prison farm is so remote from civilization, they figured he had it planned and was picked up on some distant highway. Such stories point up the obvious truth concerning all those confined behind prison walls: *they want out!*

We were guests of the Protestant chaplain, Vance Drum, Church of Christ minister who was in a prison ministry with a church in the Dallas area before going to Eastham. But he is now employed by the prison system rather than a church, and, having the heart of a shepherd, he finds real meaning in his ministry. He speaks of his prison church in the same way any preacher would refer to his ministry. He has his own elders and deacons, preaching, programs, and problems, just like any other church. While he cooperates fraternally with the Roman Catholic chaplain, he is free to conduct this church as he thinks best. He has immersed numerous inmates and soon expects to have weekly communion.

Ouida and I sat with the chaplain and his elders, some of whom are in for murder, for sometime before the service began. Ouida was impressed with the respect they showed toward each other, the prison elders for the chaplain and the chaplain for them. When we prayed together, they besought the Father with great fervency, humility, and sincerity. The service that followed exuded with enthusiasm, praise, and sharing. A recent convert gave a testimonial, explaining that it was a "Jesus freak" that turned his life around. A choir sang with gusto. God's church was in assembly behind prison bars, sinners saved by grace, which is what the church always is. One might suppose that grace is more urgent behind prison walls.

In my remarks I told of how I had met with God's church around the world, whether in a schoolroom in Japan, a thatched hut in Thailand, a college campus in Taiwan, an army base in Korea, or a back street in Uruguay, that wherever the Spirit of Christ is in the hearts of men and women there is God's church. I told them that we can all bring the kingdom of heaven into greater reality by doing God's will in our hearts and lives on this earth, wherever we are, as his will is done in heaven. Realizing that they have deep resentments, perhaps more than the rest of us, I spoke of the relationship between God forgiving us and our forgiving those whom we feel have done us wrong. "The judge is not your enemy, nor the warden or the guards, and not even those who have 'done you in,' for your real enemy is not flesh and blood," I assured them. And so I taught them to pray, as Jesus taught his disciples: *Deliver us from the evil one.*

That is of course an important lesson for us to learn whether we are in a prison with iron bars or one with sectarian barriers. Many of us still think that it is the Baptists or the Roman Catholics or even some of our own folk that is the enemy. And if ours is a warfare in which we put on "the whole armor of God," as the Scriptures mandate, then we must learn who the enemy is, one who may, unfortunately, disguise himself as an angel of light.

Speaking of adversaries, it is well for us to realize that we are sometimes our own worst enemy. When the prison elders asked me about philosophy, I told them of wise old Socrates, who was both imprisoned and executed for the most serious crime in human annals: *causing people to think critically about themselves.* The one truth that people avoid like a plague is the truth about themselves, and man's most debilitating habit is self-deception. If a man in prison should blame only himself for his plight and not the system or the judge or the unseen enemy called "they," so should it be with the rest of us.

As Ouida and I left the facility, checking in our "Visitor" badges, a guard in the tower touched a button, opening the gates before us. We stood beside our car for a time, looking back on a *real* prison stretched out on the vast plains of south Texas. It had long since been dark and the cool evening breeze reminded us of the blessings of liberty. But freedom has its rules, we recalled, and the poor guys we had visited were not willing to follow the rules. Men do not break the law, the law breaks them. We thought of all the grief, the hurts, the hate, and the despair shut up behind those prison bars. That very week one inmate had hung himself in his cell. His body had not yet been claimed, and if it is not he will be buried in the cemetery of the Texas prison system in Huntsville, the home of our infamous "Death Row." A suitable epitaph for his grave, as over the grave of all mankind: *Whatever a man sows that shall he also reap.* If men believed that inviolable law of God, prisons would be no more. But even now our prison system has a new facility on the drawing board, bigger and "better" than ever. The human race is such that we build cages for beasts and men alike.

We drove across a mile or two of farmland to the outer gate where the police woman who had checked us in from her approved list of entrants proceeded to check us out. As we looked back over the vast prison farm, the lighted guard towers barely visible against the dark Texas sky, we thanked God that the church of Jesus Christ, the pillar and ground of the truth, is there too. And so there is joy and hope in a sea of despair.

Ouida and I decided that the most impressive part of our visit was Chaplain Vance Drum himself. We know something of his struggle to be free from a prison of legalism, and now he freely "locks himself in" daily to minister to God's forgotten people. Even now I see him taking his slow walk through the mass of men and bars of the segregated units, making himself available to any who wish to talk or pray with a man of God. I asked if I might take that walk with him, but it is not allowed. "Some even there come to Christ," he told us with characteristic joy, but explained that they can't attend church. They are deemed too dangerous to leave their cells except to shower and exercise. But Chaplain Drum walks fearlessly in their midst with the Spirit of Christ in his heart and the message

of God's forgiving love on his lips. He teaches them that the poet was right that "Stone walls do not a prison make nor iron bars a cage," for if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation and *free* — the only freedom that really counts!

Chaplain Drum follows him who said, "I was in prison and you ministered unto me." — *the Editor*

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THE UNDERBELLY OF THE BLACK CHURCH OF CHRIST

Of the three entities that have evolved from the Stone-Campbell Movement, only the Churches of Christ have a substantial number of black congregations. While the number is difficult to come by, estimates by black leaders themselves would suggest something like 70,000 members in about 1,000 congregations. Since the statistics of white churches have recently come to be recognized as somewhat less than once supposed, this estimate for black churches is a reasonable ballpark figure.

These churches, like our nation in general, which has officially been described as "two distinct societies, one white and one black," are as separated from their white counterparts as if they were a separate denomination. There is almost no contact at all between white and black Churches of Christ, whether in a given locality or at a national level. The black churches have their own leadership, their own college, their own journals, and their own "Lectureship," which is a Church of Christ euphemism for a convention, whether white or black.

There are some interesting comparisons between the white and black churches. While the black churches preserve the vigorous conservatism that was common with the white churches in pre-World War II days, they are surprisingly liberal in some areas where the right-wing white churches are reactionary. The divorce-remarriage question is not an issue among the blacks. "We don't go around tearing up homes," they'll tell you. Neither do they have an authority-oriented "eldership" problem, which has already taken several white churches to court. They are more like the Baptists in that they have a strong minister-oriented polity. They do, however, unlike the Baptists, have elders, but their function is for all practical purposes subservient to the minister, who really "takes charge" of the church.

While black churches appreciate the gains made in civil rights, as do all fair-minded Americans, they do not want integration with white churches. The reason is simple and understandable. The black church, as the black schools once were, is the center of social life and blacks are in control. In integration this would be lost. Besides, black churches have in spirit a distinctly different religion. For this reason integration of black and white churches of any denomination is not a probability.

In terms of old-fashioned oratory after the order of Jesse Jackson and Martin Luther King, the black preachers can preach circles around the whites. They rev it up with vim and vitality, which reminds one of the old maxim “If you don’t put fire in your sermon put your sermon in the fire.” But sometimes an impressive oratory gives way to offensive shouting, which many in the black churches do not like, especially the better educated.

And the blacks, like the whites, are getting better education, which accounts in part for the crisis these churches now face, which they identify as liberalism. But the liberal impact is caused more by a new appreciation of the person of Christ, the grace of God, and “the glorious liberty of the sons of God” than by educational progress. In practical terms “liberalism,” a vicious heresy to the black leadership, is hardly more than believing there are Christians other than among Churches of Christ.

I have been described by the black leadership as the “mentor” of the one who champions the more open view among them, and this is why I was invited to Miami to participate in the Gold Coast Restoration Forum. The forum was called to discuss the question of whether the Churches of Christ should see themselves as the only Christians or as Christians only. Some 200 gathered for the forum, their leaders being prominent ministers from far and wide, along with college administrators.

Our people generally have always insisted that while we are Christians only we are not the only Christians, a conviction that came to be expressed as a motto. It grew out of the controversy that dates back to the days of Stone and Campbell as to whether there are Christians in the sects when both Stone and Campbell answered in the affirmative. This question is supposed to be settled in the black churches, for they see the Churches of Christ as the only Christians, and they could not care less about what Stone and Campbell believed. They go strictly by the Bible, they say, and have no interest in what men have said. But when they speak they do not simply read the Bible, but give their interpretation, which they must consider important.

Yet the struggles of our pioneers in wrestling with the same problems we face and the conclusions they reached mean little or nothing. Each generation with Bible in hand has to start from scratch. History has nothing to say to us. But this ahistorical view is not only a trait of our black churches, but with all restorationsists, more or less, including our white churches. We are a people who assume to ignore the centuries, though of course no one does or can — not if he as much as uses a printed Bible in his own vernacular! We can learn much from history without considering it authoritative. Selectivity is the rule, with the Spirit of Christ ever serving as arbiter.

I was at the forum to serve as moderator for Ivory James, Jr., minister of the "S" Avenue Church of Christ in Riviera Beach, Florida, who was the bad guy and the one they were after since he believed there are Christians in other churches. This they called false doctrine and Ivory was named a heretic for believing that the likes of Martin Luther King and Billy Graham are Christians. Like their white brethren often do, they applied Scriptures to Ivory that in their context have reference to those who deny Jesus Christ, as in 2 Jn. 9; to the perverted, factious and selfcondemned, as in Tit. 3:10 and Rom. 16:17; and to those who would traffic with pagan Rome with all her gross iniquities, as in Rev. 18:4.

At one point I chided them for orating long and loud about how "We are people of the Book" and "We go by the Bible" and then twist and bend its meanings in order to "get" their own brother in Christ. At one point I referred to their use of Rev. 18:4 where it says, "Come out of her, my people," and asked if such descriptions as "her sins are piled as high as heaven" (verse 5) and "a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird" could be applied to Ivory James and the "S" Avenue Church of Christ who are only charged with believing that there are Christians among the Baptists. To this I received a loud chorus of Yes's! They applied to their own brother in Christ what the apostle applied to pagan Rome!

So I saw the underbelly of the black Church of Christ. Black ministers often have a less than an exemplary reputation when it comes to women. I was amazed to learn when I taught at a black college for a few years how "the pastor and his women" are taken for granted, even by the pastor's wife! He is excused on the ground that "He's a man." It comes with poor grace when a man with a reputation like that rails against his brother who happens to be morally reputable, but whose only sin is that he believes God has children besides those in Churches of Christ. I called this ugly inconsistency to their attention.

The underbelly revealed incredible animosity, threats of withdrawal of fellowship, arrogance, angry shouting, and downright hostility. And now when I use the word *hostility*, I think of that dear black sister at the forum, who finally, like the prophet Jeremiah, grew tired of holding in and at last blasted the "bishops" for their unchristian behavior. She stood there with matriarchal authority, another trait of black homes and black churches, and told them in no uncertain terms that she didn't like what was going on. "You hear me?" she roared at them, "I don't like all this *h o s t i l i t y.* " The way she said *hostility* went up and down my spine like an electric current. And the presiding brother was not about to call order on mama. When she got through with the "somewhats" they looked like "nobodies" that had just been taken to the woodshed. It was worth the trip to Miami just to see that! It was black and beautiful and eloquent. And it was the underbelly!

I was the only white on the program and except for a mixed couple in the audience the only white present, except that on the second day Ira Rice, the viceroy of orthodoxy, showed up, and I was told that he was there to take care of me, which of course would be no problem for such a one as he. But I doubt that he was there gaming for me, for he said no more than that I'd been a liberal for a long time and that I knew better than to say that Billy Graham was a brother in Christ. In any event I consider Ira an old friend, dating way back, and he is enrolled in my heart as a dear brother in Christ.

Jack Evans, president of Southwestern Christian College and "titular head" of the black churches, as some of his people put it, also criticized me, both privately and publicly, for accepting Billy Graham as a Christian. Moreover, his vice-president at the college, James Maxwell, in his "Review of the Gold Coast Restoration Forum" refers to this same error on my part.

In responding to this before the Forum I did them the way Frank Norris did the Church of Christ folk in his debate with Foy E. Wallace back in the 1930's. In response to Wallace's emphasis on Mk. 16:16, Norris charged that Wallace and his people did not really believe that verse, and he would prove it. He noted that he believed the gospel and had been baptized, just like Mk. 16:16 says, and yet Norris and the Church of Christ folk did not accept him as saved, as Mk. 16:16 promises.

And so I noted that Billy Graham believes the gospel and has been baptized, and so I accept him as a Christian. So I am the one who really believes Mk. 16:16, not you, I advised them. But their exclusivism even draws the line on Martin Luther King. Even

though he gave his life for the cause of civil rights and for Christ, he was not a Christian since he was not a member of the Church of Christ. The "titular head" acknowledged him as a great man, but not a Christian. How could he be since he was a Baptist!

They were adamant that Graham could not be a Christian since he does not preach baptism. But the Scriptures make no such stipulation. It does not say "He who believes and preaches baptism," but "He who believes and is baptized." Moreover, Paul could not be a Christian on that basis, for he makes it clear that Christ sent him to preach the gospel and not to baptize. (1 Cor. 1:17). In fact I do not find any of the apostles preaching baptism. They preached Christ. I granted that once Peter preached the gospel on Pentecost (fully and completely before baptism was ever mentioned!) and sinners asked what they might do, that the apostle told them to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins. I conceded that Billy Graham and all evangelists today should do likewise. But that Graham does *not* do this, does not mean that he does not proclaim the gospel, for baptism *per se* is not the gospel. The gospel is made up of *facts about Christ;* baptism is *an act* commanded of God in obeying the gospel.

In spite of my appeal that they show love and forbearance toward their brother with whom they differed, showing from Scripture that such differences are permissable, they did what they had come to do, and that was to withdraw fellowship from Ivory James, Jr., though they did agree to delay the action for 60 days. But when Ivory told them sometime later that there was no need for delay, that he welcomed the freedom that their action implied, as did his church which even celebrated the occasion, the "hierarchy" proceeded to do their thing, issuing a letter of withdrawal.

This story reveals how far we have gone toward hierarchical government. Ivory James, Jr. is responsible only to his own congregation with its elders, and only they have the scriptural right to discipline him. Since when does an *ad hoc* forum of preachers have the right to exclude a fellow minister from the fellowship? It is a brazen breach of the liberty we have in Christ. The preachers have the right to place matters before Ivory's church for their consideration, but it is otherwise none of their business.

I believe the black Churches of Christ have a great deal to offer to the world and to other Churches of Christ, but they need to make some changes. First of all their leadership must come to see that by the bowels of Christ they might be wrong about some things. They must become more reasonable and responsible by shouting less and thinking more. They must cease imposing their personal opinions upon each other as tests of fellowship, and, above all, they must realize that God's truth does not begin and end with them and

that the kingdom of God on earth reaches far beyond what they call “the Church of Christ.” Their leaders must cultivate exemplary conduct, Christian character, humility, and a responsible handling of Scripture.

Even now that I have seen the underbelly I still love the black church and have hope for its future, for a change for the better among us is occurring there too. As more blacks come to see deeper dimensions of the grace of God and the glorious joy of freedom in Christ they will move farther and farther from the debilitating sectarianism that has dogged them. They will come to see that they can believe they are right without having to conclude that everyone else is wrong. Their enthusiasm, properly directed, could go far in lifting the white churches out of their doldrums. — *the Editor*

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ARE WE IN FELLOWSHIP WITH THE DEAD?

You have come to the spirits of just men made perfect. — Heb. 12:23

That exciting line in Hebrews indicates that we *are* or should be in fellowship with the righteous and illustrious dead. That has to mean first of all that the dead are not really dead but very much alive. It shows that life really begins at death and that death is not the end of life. It underscores what Jesus h.as taught us, that “God is not the God of the dead but of the living, for all live unto him” (Lk. 20:38). The passage in Hebrews shows that we are as much in communion with the Church of Christ in heaven as we are with the ecclesia on earth. One line says that in coming to Christ we have come “to the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven,” which refers to the relation we have to the church throughout the world. That we are all “enrolled in heaven” means we are really citizens of heaven and but pilgrims on this earth. Even though most Christians around the world will never know each other personally, they are nonetheless in communion with each other. We can all take heart that God’s church is out there, all around the world, and we can suffer together and rejoice together. That is fellowship.

Another line in the same context shows that as believers we have come to (into a relationship with) “the spirits” who have gone on to heaven and have been made perfect or complete. They are the church in heaven and we are the church that is still on earth. It is not that they are there and we are here. There is an important sense in which we have come to them. That too is fellowship. There is a sense then in which we are to commune with the dead.

This in no way allows for necromancy, sorcery, or black magic, for the Scriptures clearly condemn communication with “familiar spirits.” I am not suggesting anything akin to the occult. I am only seeking to draw an important truth from Scripture: that fellowship with God reaches beyond his community upon earth to include “innumerable angels in festal gathering” and “the souls of good men made perfect” (Phillips). I am not talking about receiving messages from the dead or additional revelation from some departed spirit, and I hold no brief for seances where some departed loved one is “conjured up.” All such practices are Satanic. I don’t even believe in reading horoscopes, not even for “kicks.” I avoid even the appearance of the occult.

But if the dead do not talk to us it may be that we can talk to them. While I am certain that God hears such meditation as he would any prayer, I am of the opinion that the departed saints might also hear. But I do not expect nor even desire that the dead respond. I can thank my mother for being the good mother she was or I can talk with all the church in heaven in appreciation for the great victories already won for Luther, Tyndale, Wycliffe, for the martyrs. I accept by faith that I am as much in fellowship with the dead saints as the living saints, and so I can “be with them” in some way. Otherwise “you have drawn near” (Phillips) to the church in heaven has little meaning.

The following quotations from Alexander Campbell, in a letter to his wife in 1841, show that at least one worthy brother agrees with what I am saying.

> I have been walking in the woods, casting my mind over past scenes and past times, conversing one while with the dead, and at another communing with the far-distant living. I have placed myself amidst my domestic group some 20 years ago and the years succeeding, and have revived my family circle with its occasional guests.
>
> We ought often think of the dead — not only of our own dead, but of the dead saints of other times. Their history affords us instruction, example and motive.

Campbell mentions various ones by name: his first wife and her parents “good father and mother Brown,” his mother and two sisters, and “the excellent Dr. Holliday,” and then asks, “Where are they and how employed? Think they never of those they left behind? And shall we never think of them who have gone before? Must we mutually and perpetually forget each other?”

Around our house Ouida and I are much in communion with both living and dead saints. The living from many states come by to see us, and we thank God for everyone of them, princes and princesses of heaven. But we also visit with those who have gone on. We have read and talked so much of William Barclay and Alexander Campbell that they are permanent guests. And presently Ouida is enjoying the company of Elisa Davies, whose lengthy autobiography she consumes, reading it over and over. She is Ouida's hero, a spunky, committed, beautiful Christian woman if ever there was one, and Ouida gets blurry-eyed as she recounts her sacrificial life, such as serving in Alexander Campbell's horne, attending his sick and helping him bury his dead.

Now don't you think we can now and again speak up and say, "Dear sister Elisa, we thank you for your visit and for writing that great book" and such as, "Willie, we thank God that he gave you so many gifts and that you were willing to share them"?

If you don't agree with such as that, then you will agree, I assume, that we have indeed come to or drawn near to the saints in heaven, as Heb. 12:23 says. Now you tell me what it means. — *the Editor*

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ARE WE REALLY BORN AGAIN?

By Cecil Hook

In the new birth, does a person actually become a new being, or is the concept of a new birth a literary device describing the change affected in the life of a convert to Christ?

Nicodemus had some trouble in understanding what Jesus meant about the requirement of a new birth, and he has plenty of company yet. We accept Jesus' explanation that it is not a second birth from one's physical mother but, in accepting the idea of spiritual regeneration, do we understand it as being the bringing into existence of a new creature?

There is a natural birth and a spiritual birth. Jesus explained, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6). In the birth of the water and the Spirit, "We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the sinful body might be destroyed" (Rom. 6:6). We died with Christ, were buried with him by

baptism into death, and were raised with him that we might walk in newness of life. “And you made alive, when you were dead through the trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1). Being baptized into Christ, we can be assured that “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation (or creature); the old has passed away, behold, the new has come” (2 Cor. 5:17).

These and other references speak of being born again, being born anew, being raised, being made alive, being regenerated, becoming a new creature, receiving newness of life, and putting on the new man. In this transaction one becomes a child of God, which in analogy with natural birth would indicate that a new life comes into existence. These expressions seem to indicate that a new spirit-being is initiated into life replacing an old, dead, discarded one.

All of this brings some questions. Is not the soul/spirit/life immortal? If only the reborn being is immortal, then the natural, unregenerated life ceases to exist. If the unregenerated life is annihilated, then it does not endure hell. If we accept the premise that a new life is created in the new birth, we must conclude that only the apostate reborn person will suffer everlasting punishment.

Metaphors are only one of the many literary devices used in scripture. A metaphor is a figure of speech where a word literally denoting one idea is used in place of another to suggest likeness or analogy between them, like Jesus saying he was a door, a vine, or a shepherd. So, an abrupt, sanctifying change of life is referred to as a new birth. The change initiated by faith which produces repentance confirmed by baptism is like a person putting off one life and putting on another. An old identity is repudiated and a new one is established with Christ involving new desires, aims, goals, and purposes.

The physical body is not changed in this conversion process. Each organ still functions as before. The body is still responsive to the same desires, instincts, and inclinations. Although there is help in controling the appetites, the alcoholic is still tempted by alcohol, and the sexual interests of the lustful are not diminished by some act of God in the new birth:

In the new birth, the soul/spirit/life is unchanged. The person has the same knowledge, memory, experience, self-image, abilities, and emotions as before baptism. While it is true that the convert will have a new determination and added help to use and control these, these elements were not refined and changed by an act of the Spirit in the person. We, not the Spirit, must “put to death” our sinful nature (Col. 3:5). In the conversion process the old, sinful person is not perfected by an act of God but, through the grace of God applying

the merit of Jesus, the person is accounted as pure and innocent and as though righteousness were actually accomplished in him. Because of the sinner's faith, righteousness is imputed to him. He is justified by grace through faith rather than being transformed into a different kind of person by the Spirit.

Being baptized into Christ, the guilt of sin is remitted by Christ's atonement. That guilt had brought separation and alienation from God, which is spiritual death. Life — forgiveness, reconciliation — is restored when 'the believing sinner is united with Christ in baptism.

Even though we may all admit that the references to the new birth are metaphorical, there may be some lingering doubt, or even serious objection, in the mind of some. The metaphorical explanation credits the change within us to our own reception of, and response to, the gospel. It leaves out any change directly affected in the individual by the power of the Holy Spirit. Upon our obedience to the gospel, doesn't the Spirit enter into us to change us into the kind of person Christ wants us to be? Isn't that a work accomplished for us and in us?

At this point, our inherited sacramental concepts mix with thoughts of achieved righteousness to cloud our vision. According to the system of the sacraments, when certain prescribed rites or ceremonies are performed, grace is infused into the soul and, by this means, God makes us pure and righteous and the kind of person he wants us to be. This calls for infused and achieved, or accomplished, righteousness rather than the sinner being accounted as righteous when he can never be anything but a sinner. The one concept is that of baptismal regeneration — a change worked in the individual through a sacrament to make him acceptable. The other concept is that of justification on the basis of faith, in which imputed justification is metaphorically termed as a regeneration or new birth.

It is true that we receive the renewal in the Holy Spirit in our washing of regeneration. This is done through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which pouring out is the same as was fulfilled by the baptism of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, for the same word used in quoting Joel in Acts 2:17 is used by Paul in the next reference in speaking of his outpouring on us in our washing of regeneration. This identifies the gift and the baptism of the Spirit as being the same. This is stated comprehensively by Paul: "He saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in the hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:5f).

The Spirit cannot be poured out literally so that men may be filled with the Holy Spirit literally, nor can one be baptized in the Holy Spirit literally by immersion into and emersion out of him. Neither can we believe that the Spirit literally inseminates water so that it gives us birth. This must have its metaphorical aspects, but it does not deny the activity of the Spirit. The Spirit does not over-power the individual to do his work for "the spirits of the prophets are subject to prophets" (1 Cor. 14:32).

I cannot understand or explain how the Spirit gives me life, lives in me, and works in me, and I doubt that anyone else can. I am still not in position to speak condescendingly of Nicodemus' lack of perception. Nicodemus could not understand the mysteries of the wind but he could see the undeniable effects of it. I have evidence of the working of the indwelt Spirit that surpasses the usual subjective, individually perceived evidence when I see the fruit of the Spirit in the life of the one who claims the promise. — *1350 Huisache, New Braunfels, Texas 78130*

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OUR CHANGING WORLD

Charles Hodge, in a church bulletin, tells the story of how a Church of Christ bought "a sectarian church" for a meeting house, which had a cross atop its steeple. Seeing this as the unpardonable sin, the brethren resolved to remove it, only to find the steeple too steep and too fragile to climb. They at last resolved the problem by shooting it down with hunting rifles, an episode so unusual that it made headlines in the local paper. Brother Hodge comments to the effect that if the Church of Christ has elaborate baptistries with pictures and fantastic designs, then it can have a cross. He further states, "It is ironic that the only people who have a right to have a cross, cannot!" If the story brother Hodge tells is "silly" as he describes it, his comment reflects a patent tragedy in our thinking. If we really believe that we are "the only people who have a right to have a cross," then we have no business calling others "sectarian." Surely any church that preaches Jesus Christ and him crucified, which is what the apostle Paul preached, has the right to use the cross as a symbol. This "only true church" fallacy of ours must go and now!

Ivory James, Jr., who ministers to the "S" Ave. Church of Christ in Riviera Beach, FL and who is one of our finest preachers, black or white, recently had an article in *Community Update*, an area newspaper, entitled "The Voice of the Open Tomb." In the essay he

points to the empty tomb of our Lord as the basis of hope, truth, and love in a world that is plagued with skepticism.

In his *Lamplighter* David Reagan reported on a recent trip to South Africa in which he stated that while he had been prepared by the media to expect a totalitarian government insensitive to human rights he found a political system freer than two-thirds of those that exist in the world. He found freedom of speech and assembly, and a press "full of rousing criticism of government policies." He was impressed by the fast growing middle class that includes coloreds, blacks, and Indians. While he found injustice, he noted that the churches, many of which are integrated, are sensitive to the problem. Most important of all, he found a hunger for God, people who are eager to hear the gospel, more so than any nation he has visited.

In a recent issue of *Horizons* Mark Maxey, longtime missionary to Japan, tells how the Christian Missionary Fellowship, and agency serving Christian Churches, asked the Church of Christ (non-instrument) in Kenya, Africa, which is legally registered with the Kenya government, for a working relationship. The Church of Christ responded, "What else can we do? You are our brothers and we must put into practice the unity we talk about!" Praise the Lord! Our people in Africa see the light. We have talked about unity long enough and we have unity forums and summits coming out our ears. We must practice the unity we talk about! The "how" is in that African example, *since we are brothers we are to accept each other as equals and now, despite differences.*

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BOOK NOTES

The six-pac of C. S. Lewis in matching volumes in paperback is still available at only $19.00 for the set. They are *The Problem of. Pain, The Screwtape Letters, The Great Divorce, Miracles, The Abolition of Man,* and *Mere Christianity.* Singly they are $3.75. Many have given C. S. Lewis credit for turning their lives around. If you have not read him, here is the place to start.

Anything that Leslie Newbegin writes is worth reading. One of the builders of the modern ecumenical movement, he understands cross-cultural problems in the church's witness to the world. This makes his *Foolishness to the Greeks,* as study in the gospel and western culture, promising reading. $7.95 postpaid.

It is rare to see a responsible treatment these days on the Christian view of politics and government. Paul Marshall's *Thine Is the Kingdom* is such a book. He discusses everything from the nature of politics and justice to war, abortion and pornography. It closes with a guide for Christian action. $7.95 postpaid.

We have a fresh supply of one of our most popular titles, *A Short History of the Early Church* by Harry Boer. $6.95 postpaid. Also *The Mormon Papers* by Harry Ropp at $4.50 postpaid.

William Neil was an old Scotsman that pored over the teaching of Jesus as if he were mining for gold, particularly the difficult teachings of Jesus. This resulted in two books, *The Difficult Sayings of Jesus* and *More Difficult Sayings of Jesus.* They are a veritable gold mine of information. These are $3.50 and $6.50; $9.00 for both postpaid.

We are delighted with the response to our offer of a bonus copy of Leroy Garrett's *The Stone-Campbell Movement*, a readable history of Christian Churches-Churches of Christ. We will continue to offer a free copy when you send us eight subs to this journal at the club rate of $3.00 each ($24.00 total), new subs or renewals, including your own, but you must request the free copy.

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READERS' EXCHANGE

The church is right in its refusal to endorse homosexuality, and that is what the homosexual community demands. Until they come to Jesus in repentance, the church is right to keep them at arm's length. For the church to accept practicing homosexuals would be akin to accepting avowed adulterers who take pride in their adultery. — *David Reagan, Drawer K, McKinney, TX 75069*

(The church can accept homosexuality as a perplexing human phenomenon, as "abnormal" if that is the word, without endorsing homosexual acts. There are many homosexuals who abstain from sexual acts just as there are heterosexuals who abstain. Whether the church accepts those who commit homosexual acts depends on the attitude of those caught up in this sin. The church must distinguish between those who "take pride" in their sin, regardless of the sin, and those who long for something better. In any event, the church, like its Lord, is to receive sinful men and with compassion. It is better to err on the side of

compassion and conciliation than on the side of harshness and rejection. But one thing for sure, the church must never approve of what it clearly sees to be sin. —*Ed.)*

A basic problem with our Bible study is that we are apt to read into passages what we want them to say rather than what God really said. So, balancing our need to understand the intent rather than the letter of what God says in His Word, there is great need for us to avoid shading any passage with our own pet theories. This is what happens when brethren develop a "law of exclusion" and "law of silence." — *Ray Downen, Box 1065, Joplin, MO. 64802*

Reading your "The Campbell Myth" made me realize that one of the factors that influenced my sojourn away from sectarianism was the Memphis School of Preaching, which was then at Getwell, taught me to respect Campbell and Stone. I so respected them that I began reading them, only to discover that they too were flawed. but I caught the true spirit of their reformation, which got me interested in your paper in 1970. So while there is a myth involved in their adoration, we are nonetheless led to look more deeply into our heritage and to the freedom that Campbell envisioned. —*Michael Hall, 1333 N. 23rd St., Grand Junction, CO 81501*

Steve Eckstein, now at Michigan Christian College, will be speaking at Irondyke Family Camp near La Grande, Oregon, July 27-Aug. 2. Write the camp at Box 99, La Grande, Oregon 97850 or call 503-963-0268. — *Don Henry, La Grande, OR.*

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